

**INVESTIGATING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF ELL EDUCATORS:  
SEARCHING FOR INSTRUCTIONAL INSIGHTS TO PROMOTE  
ELL STUDENTS' LEARNING**

A Record of Study

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sustained academic growth of the Mexican population in the public schools of the Rio Grande Valley of Texas has precipitated a need for new and innovative ways to effectively educate English Language Learners (ELLs). In place of common external factors typically used such as attendance, socio-economic status, and test scores to address ELL's learning, this study uses the lived educational descriptions of ELL teachers, who were once ELL students, to mine for new instructional insights to promote ELL student learning. This study enlightens our perspectives about the role of student identities both at home and at school that can lead to greater language acquisition and greater academic success via new methodologies. To that effect, discourse analysis was utilized to ascertain the identity(s) of ELL educators, who were once ELL students.

The convergence of the N-Identity and I-Identity, lead to a third, albeit just as important D-Identity that provides much needed insight for school directors, curriculum facilitators, administrators, and educators who teach ELL students every day.

## **DEDICATION**

To my grandparents – your bravery has led to this moment.

To my children – thank you for being my greatest inspiration to succeed.

To my wife – thank you for being the foundation upon which my success is built.

To my siblings – thank you for all your support, your love, and your belief in me.

To my father – thank you for always supporting me and loving me unconditionally.

To my mother – my hero – my inspiration – my biggest supporter.

I love you now and always.

This is as much your success as it is mine.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Rio Grande Valley of Texas is comprised of four counties, within 4,000 square miles along the U.S./Mexico border. According to the 2010 U.S. Census (Rodriguez, 2012) the Latino population in each of the four counties is well over 85% (primarily from Mexico) compared to the 40% average in the State of Texas as a whole. Other common characteristics include more than 30% below the poverty level; 78% of the population speaks a language other than English; less than 60% complete high school; and less than 14% earn a college degree (Rodriguez, 2012). This study transpired based on experiences at Desert Rose Middle School (DRMS – a pseudonym), and Yellow Rose Independent School District (YRISD – a pseudonym), which serves as a microcosm of the aforementioned.

YRISD is the second largest school district in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas servicing more than 29,000 students annually. Their student population is 99.6% Hispanic and 48.3% English Language Learners (ELLs). An examination of YRISD's annual graduation rate, over the last several years, details an average yearly dropout rate of 17% (Texas Education Agency, 2015b).

Desert Rose Middle School has failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the last two reporting periods. For the school year ending 2011 it did not meet required improvement in Reading based on the sub-population performance of ELL students. In fact, DRMS saw an 8% decrease in ELL performance in Reading compared to the 2010 result. Additionally, DRMS saw a 4% decrease in all core area test scores for the sub-population group of ELL students compared to the 2010 results. The State of Texas did not report campus data for the school year ending 2012 (academic distinctions are now valid for two years) however, for the school year ending 2013 Desert Rose Middle School again did not meet AYP in *all* core areas (34% passing rate for the ELL sub-population) as measured by the failure to meet Level II safeguards established by the TEA

(Texas Education Agency, 2013). As a result, DRMS was placed on the 2015-2016 TEA Public Education Grant (PEG) List for failing to achieve passing rates on STAAR (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness) exams that are less than or equal to 50% in any of the two preceding three years: 2012, 2013, and 2014 (Texas Education Agency, 2015a).

This lack of progress is directly related to the lack of academic success in the sub-population of students categorized as English Language Learners. Over the last six years there has been a noted increase in the number of ELL students coming to sixth grade unprepared for rigorous classroom work. An examination of the data shows the number of ELL students entering the sixth grade this year (2014-2015) at DRMS was 137 out of 280; 48.9% - the largest in the school's history (S. Saenz, personal communication, January 9, 2015).

Nationally, Luster (2011), Andrews (2013), and Schachter (2013) suggest that the fastest growing school populations in America are ELLs and that population has increased by 65% since 1993 with approximately 70% of those ELLs speaking Spanish. Interestingly, while the pedagogical knowledge and research associated with ELL education has increased, YRISD and DRMS have regressed and are experiencing record numbers of ELL students. The researchers' interactions suggest that many of the educators in Yellow Rose Independent School District were once Spanish-speaking immigrants, who progressed in their acquisition of English and became educators. Why then, are ELL students not progressing in their acquisition of English as did their predecessors?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

To effectively examine the lived educational experiences of ELL educators with similar backgrounds of ELL students, it is necessary to examine the literature associated with this phenomenon. Mexicans, who fall under the category of Latinos, are the most predominant group within the Latino category and represent 59% of the total Latino population in the United States (Reardon and Galindo, 2009). First-generation students are defined as those students born outside of the United States, whose mothers and/or fathers were also born outside of the United States (Reardon and Galindo, 2009).

Latino children have been dichotomized into two major sub-groups by some:

1. Immigrant children, or children of immigrant parents, who speak Spanish and little or no English when they enter school.
2. Second or later generation children who speak only English or bilingual children who are fluent in English but possess varied levels of proficiency in Spanish (Lindholm-Leary and Block, 2010).

Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act (Cook, Boals, and Lundberg, 2011) partly defined an ELL student as one, “whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet proficiency on state examinations, to achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English, and to have the opportunity to participate fully in society” (p. 67). A caveat is that Federal law does not define “proficiency” of ELLs in an academic context. Rather, the law states, ELLs must have the “ability” to be proficient in said content(s) (Cook et al., 2011). However, a measure of sub- populations of students’ academic achievement and the achievement of their classmates on standardized tests is factored into the campuses AYP report card. This dichotomy has led to what Phillipson (1992) calls “linguicism” (p. 220).



Phillipson (1992) states, “Linguicism has taken over from racism as a more subtle way of hierarchizing social groups in the contemporary world” (p. 220). The credibility of this idea is furthered by Pennycook (1998) who states: “[Language] perpetuated a social order that placed native English speakers at the top and non-native English speakers, especially those languages spoken by students who were not white, at the bottom” (p. 220). For that reason, the term *transfronterizo* (which can be translated to ‘border crossing’) has emerged, and most accurately represents these ELL students, especially in the state of Texas. They are from “*acá*” and “*allá*” (here and there) and the need to see them achieve academically, bilingually, and biculturally is paramount to their success (de la Piedra and Araujo, 2012).

Block (2011) suggests that approximately 80% of ELLs in the USA speak Spanish as their primary language (p.237). Between 1995 and 2005 the nationwide enrollment of ELLs increased by 57% - a number totaling approximately 5 million students that represented 10.5% of the overall 2005 - 2006 school population (Warhol and Mayer, 2012). In examining the research on these new immigrants, in particular Mexican immigrants and their abilities to adapt, it is important to keep in mind that adaptation is not a process that happens to a child, but rather a *constant* interaction with others from the adopted language and cultural setting where adaptation occurs at differing rates (Portes and Rivas, 2011).

Whites (Anglos) represent approximately 90% of all public school teachers and many, if not most, of their teacher training programs did not prepare them for these diverse classroom settings (Sue, 2011). Sue (2011) argues that this lack of training can disrupt effective student/teacher/home communication and produce not only less than effective teaching, but an unintentional challenge to the student’s sense of nationalism.

Therefore, as the research demonstrates, understanding and appreciating the role of ELLs in America’s classrooms is critical to helping them achieve the ability to become proficient in the four language domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Latinos, and in particular Mexicans,

have arrived in such large numbers in such concentrated parts of the country, that they are not inclined to acculturate themselves. Immigrants and their children resist learning English, place devotedness and faith in their ethnic communities and home countries, while rejecting the aforementioned Anglo U.S. culture (Portes & Rivas, 2011). As educators deal with this reality, what must be remembered is that perspectives on race are learned. They are not necessarily the outcome of oppression or position in society as espoused by Sue (2011). Immigrant parents want their children to preserve some elements of their cultural identity, while the new host society, particularly schools, pulls them in the opposite direction.

The challenge then, is for states, districts, and educators to develop the “capacity and expertise” (Schachter, 2013) to teach and deal with this infusion of ELL students. Multiple researchers (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond & Bell, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Honavar, 2008; Luster, 2011) report that the relationship between student achievement and teacher skills is linked because that achievement is based upon, “[What] teachers are able to do academically and pedagogically is crucial to what students learn” (p. 66).

Rodriguez, Ringler, O’Neal, & Bunn (2009) suggest that there is a clear consensus by educators that teacher expectation contributes to ELL academic success. As such, multiple researchers (Rodriguez et al., 2009) put forth that educators have: (1) considerable influence on the achievement of all students – especially low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse students; (2) teachers contribute to the formation of a student’s cultural identity; and (3) teachers help students cope with complex administrative procedures in schools and school systems.

Moreover, Portes and Rivas (2011) contend children of today’s immigrants and subsequent generations will eventually join the body of society, even if they do not ultimately achieve upward mobility. Such stagnation is a result of immigrants and their children being isolated from opportunities for mobility offered by the mainstream (Telles and Ortiz, 2008). It is not that they avoid assimilation; it is because they belong to heavily disadvantaged ethnic and racial groups. It is

no secret that each child must negotiate the advantages and disadvantages of their specific family background, but there are some areas related to immigrant children and children of immigrants' aspirations and expectations of which educators should take heed.

First, immigrant children and first and second generation children of immigrants tend to have higher ambition, higher aspiration, (or both) than their third generation and higher counterparts, and have generally superior academic performance. Second, immigrants of different national origins vary significantly in both ambition and performance. Mexican immigrants tend to populate themselves at the low end of the spectrum in ambition and performance. Third, parents and peers powerfully influence ambitions and if they are at the lower end of the ambition spectrum, then this will constitute a negative impact on their children's ambition. Finally, aspirations and academic performance are strongly correlated, although it is hard to disaggregate the relationship. However, it is interpreted as a casual loop where the two reinforce one another (Portes & Rivas, 2011).

The powerful influence of parents and peers noted above, also play a part in self-identification and self-esteem. Self-identification and self-esteem are key avenues of assimilation into the new culture. Portes and Rivas (2011) note several areas of agreement regarding self-identity. First, place of birth and length of residence in the host society is/are powerful determinants of self-identity. Second, parental effects, on self-identity, are inconsistent and the immigrants look to the host society for identification. Third, the pursuit of education promotes a dual or "transformational" identity. This means the immigrants adopt a hyphenated American identity – instead of "[Latino]" in the case of Mexicans, they choose "Mexican- American" as a way of tolerating the ambiguity and incorporating the diverse cultural elements. Finally, repeated incidents of discrimination by the host society lower self-esteem and awaken a reactive ethnicity among the immigrant youths that promotes them to regress. Again, what must be remembered from an educational viewpoint is that high self-esteem, which is greatly impacted by society and more directly schools, is associated with higher educational aspirations and higher academic performance

(Aldous, 2006; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Portes & Rivas, 2011).

Discussing higher educational aspirations of immigrants also begs a discussion of language acquisition. Latino children have lower levels of school readiness at the start of kindergarten than their Anglo counterparts. Among Latino school age children, a majority of whom are Mexican, 84% are native born (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Emanating from this fact is the question, “Why is language acquisition such a barrier for new immigrants?” A credible barrier is that 41% of Latinos and 18% of school age Latino children report that they do not use English at home and do not speak English well (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Latino students require minimum English skills to understand instructional content, participate in meaningful learning interactions, and engage in inquiry processes that further their learning. Because parental English proficiency also affects student learning, and new immigrant parents have not acquired the language, Latino parents may be less likely to monitor, support, and intervene in their child’s schooling experiences.

Of equal importance to school readiness, 27% of Latino school aged children live below the poverty line. They are three times more likely than their Anglo counterparts to grow up in poverty, and one third more likely to have moved within the past year (Reardon and Galindo, 2006; Lichter, Qian, and Crowley, 2005; Neut, 2006). What is ironic, in relation to language acquisition, is that fluent bilingualism is associated with higher cognitive development, higher academic performance, and higher self-esteem in adolescence. Learning the language of the host society (L2) is directly related to the mastery of the native language and indisputably a major precondition for moving ahead within the host society (Portes & Rivas, 2011). Teachers’ perception of Mexican immigrant school aged children is that their learning ability is below that of other students and they are inferior to their African, Asian, and Anglo counterparts. This results in a closing of the ranks to defend themselves against the discrimination and abandoning aspirations for higher academic achievement and rejecting members of their own group who have such aspirations (Tellez and Ortiz, 2008). Thus, the resulting effect is the establishment of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The available evidence supports the paradox that preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage of the native countries often helps the immigrant children move ahead in the United States. Certainly, moving ahead entails the acquisition of an education. However, Latino students are more segregated from White students and they are more likely to attend schools with few experienced teachers and high concentrations of poor and non-English proficient students (Reardon and Galindo, 2006).

It should be noted that the aforementioned experience of teaching high concentrations of poor and non-English proficient students does not suggest a “wholesale replacement of teaching styles” (Rodriguez, Manner, & Darcy, 2010, p. 141). Rather, it should be interpreted as professionals who are not just simply interested in learning and using strategies via rote or automaticity; instead let it suggest that educators of ELLs must recognize that in conjoining new ways of presenting material that enhanced, and did not replace, their own professional practice was advantageous to all parties (Rodriguez et al., 2010). Language acquisition via the four domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) is a time consuming process and cannot be expedited. As noted by Lee and Jeong (2013), “Language is best learned when it is the medium of instruction and not solely the object of learning” (p.91). In other words, given sufficient time and utilizing language domain strategies closing the academic gap of ELLs is attainable.

As noted earlier, “linguicism” has permeated social groups in contemporary society. As such, self-efficacy, particularly of ELLs, must be considered. Social learning theorists (Jinks and Morgan, 1999) perceived self-efficacy as a sense of one’s confidence regarding the performance of specific tasks. For ELLs and other learners this confidence or lack thereof influences their learning across all areas of the curriculum. Research findings from multiple studies (Rodriguez et al., 2009) further suggests that in studying academic domains, researchers have concluded that students’ perceptions of their own academic capabilities influence their self-esteem.

Findings of research cited in Karathanos (2009); Bandura (1986) and Nespor (1987) argue

that individuals' beliefs are often good indicators of the decisions they make and the beliefs educators hold directly influence their educational practices and behaviors in the classroom. Teachers' attitudes toward ELL students and language diversity in general, can promote or dismiss commonly accepted myths about language and cognitive development (Karathanos, 2009). This is critical in that teachers' attitudes that promote those unwarranted myths can impede instructional practices conducive to ELL student success. Quintanar-Sarellana (2004) summarizes this point succinctly: "[Teachers] must view bilingualism as an asset – not a liability" (p. 92).

Pawan and Craig (2011) support utilizing life histories of ELL success stories to assist in the adaptation of classroom practices. Their study on teacher responses to ELL instruction yielded the following: What teachers know about *their* teaching is shaped through *their* experiences as learners of teaching. In this framework, they found language teacher knowledge is grounded in: (1) the teacher as a learner; (2) the nature of schools and schooling; (3) the nature of language teaching. In other words, much of how teachers teach is directly impacted by the way they were taught. Modifying these deeply embedded values and experiences is no easy task. Consequently, by investigating the educational experiences of ELL educators, it is anticipated that an understanding of school and schooling will emerge and provide insights on how to best serve the ELL student population.

For far too long educators have attributed the lack of English proficiency, amongst ELL learners, to an inextricably related lack of intellectual ability (Garret and Holcomb, 2005). English Language Learners have the lowest graduation rate of any segment of the student population in the United States and the completion rate at the post-secondary level is even lower. Additionally, multiple researchers (Garret & Holcomb, 2005; Romo, 1993) have found that Mexicans and Latinos experience a high degree of segregation from other members of their academic population, and this poses a huge socialization problem for many immigrants who experience ostracism and alienation. The pursuit of an education and acquired learning should be cause for celebration; not

alienation.

Studies of the problems Chicano students face are done so without taking into account student's narratives in a meaningful way (Pizarro, 1999). Furthermore, student's narratives present the "other side" of the story and serve as "counter-stories to the dominant school narrative." The advantage of storytelling is that it "raises individual's consciousness" in the storyteller and clears the way for further social action (Fernandez, 2002). Language forms part of the identity kit of individuals and transmits information from their gender, ethnicity, geographical origin, occupation, and social class (Andrews, 2013). Students may resist the acquisition of another language such as English, if they consider that language as a "threat" to their identities (Andrews, 2013; Lemke, 2002).

Ideally, the intention is to teach the ELL students' academic English so that they can have wider access to curriculum that fulfills their potential both academically and socially. As educators the need to consider the lived experiences of ELL students in language policies is critical to helping the students be successful; it should be viewed from a "participatory" and "holistic" perspective (Andrews, 2013). This would include contextualizing their lived experiences in their classroom instruction. The key to this information lies within the educators who actually teach ELLs and share their ELL students lived educational experiences. It is well past time that ELL learning is viewed from a student's perspective and not an institutional one (Harris, 2012; Liggett, 2010).

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Multiple researchers, Andrews (2013), Goetz and LeCompte (1984), Hoepfl (1997), Ogbu (1981), and Strauss and Corbin (1990) call for a qualitative approach versus a quantitative approach when a research study seeks to make “marginalized” voices heard. Additionally, a qualitative approach provides depth and details for theories that influence students’ actions and talk. Concurrently, it provides for the researcher’s descriptive narrative data to mine and construct interpretations and theoretical deductions for the purpose of identifying implications in the real world. To accomplish this, a discourse analyses methodology was employed. Discourse analysis is a sequence of sentences; it is the way in which sentences connect and relate across time in either speech or writing (Gee, 2014).

Discourse analysis concerns itself with the various flows of sentences into one another and the meaning created to facilitate interpretation; it involves people communicating via language, mind, body, and environment. That is to say, it brings to light the subjects figured world. Based on the writing of Holland, et al. (1998) as noted by Urrieta (2007) figured worlds have four characteristics: “(1) Figured worlds are cultural phenomenon to which people are recruited, or into which people enter, and that develop through the work of their participants. (2) Figured worlds function as contexts of meaning within which social encounters have significance and people’s positions matter. Activities relevant to these worlds take meaning from them and are situated in particular times and places. (3) Figured worlds are socially organized and reproduced, which means that in them people are sorted and learn to relate to each other in different ways. (4) Figured worlds distribute people by relating them to landscapes of action; thus activities related to the worlds are populated by familiar social types and host to individual senses of self (p. 108).”

While these figured worlds with their typical attributes (participants, activities, language, and environment) are realized by society, they do not normally come to mind as a consideration for



schools and students. This is important because figured worlds are “theories” or pictures or models that people consider about how things work in the world they consider “typical” or “normal” (Gee, 2014b).

### 3.1 Types of Discourse Analysis

Gee (2014) distinguishes between two types of discourse; big *D* and little *d*. Uppercase “D” is a way of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and utilizing various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particularly sort of socially recognizable identity. The Four identities are: N-identity, defined by ones natural birth into a culture/heritage or acquired as a result of being born into a culture but not a heritage; the I- identity, defined by authorized position – either ascribed by the institution, or achieved by the individual; the D-identity, represented by individual ascribed traits or those achieved by the individual; and the A-identity, characterized by groups of people with shared practices (Andrews, 2013).

Andrews (2013) further sub-divides the uppercase “D” as identities that serve as the foundation for interpreting the illustrative comments made by the participants in this study. The N-Identity is interpreted as Latino by national origin; the I-Identity is defined as expectations that institutions create that Latinos need to fulfill; the D-Identity is an individual who is spoken about or viewed by others as Latino, while an *achieved* Latino is the pride an individual has of being Latino. Finally, the A-Identity, points to Latinos who belong to the Latino group or non-Latinos acting or dressing like Latinos.

Lower case “d” means language-in-use or stretches of language, such as conversations or stories (Gee, 2014). While Andrews (2013) contends that one “cannot” separate the big *D* from the little *d* while performing a discourse analysis, this researcher feels that as a result of a shared heritage, but *not* a shared culture, the researchers language, actions, interactions, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and lived experiences cannot be put together in a manner as to resemble something familiar to the participants in the study in terms of *who* (identity) and *what* (activity);

therefore lessening the likelihood of a shared identity as detailed above.

Gee (2014) utilizes seven building tasks and six tools of inquiry for discourse analysis. In all there are 42 possible questions that can be asked of any data set. Ideally, any discourse analysis would probe all 42 questions. However, most analyses apply only some (Fiano, 2013; Gee, 2014). The six tools of inquiry are: social languages, discourse, discourse models, intertextuality, situated meanings, and conversations. For the purpose of this study, *conversations* were the primary tool of inquiry. The seven building tasks of inquiry include: Significance, Practices/Activities, Identities, Relationships, Politics, Connections, as well as, Sign Systems and Knowledge. This research focused on *identities* as the primary means to disseminate meaning from the interviews. The meaning derived from the interviews was critical to this research for the purpose of identifying the most prevalent identities; from a *Latino* perspective.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

Narrative Research is characterized by researchers who collect stories from individuals about individuals' lived lives and told experiences (Creswell, 2013). Narrative stories are gathered through many forms of data; the primary of which are interviews. Researchers Brown and Durrheim (2009) support this definition as they espouse that it is the interviewer's role to incite answers for the purpose of finding out how people understand their life and/or world by asking questions and listening to them. These narrative stories are often heard and shaped by the researcher(s) into a chronological order, although they may not be told that way by the participant. Stories are analyzed in various ways; containing turning points and occurring within specific places or situations. This research study defines the specific place(s) or situation(s) as school.

### **4.1 Selection Criteria**

Convenience sampling was the selection strategy utilized for selection of participants for the study. Subjects were typical, ordinary people convenient to the study, and whose lived experiences in school are critical to illustrating the types of challenges ELL students experience in American schools (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, participants must have met the following criteria:

- Must be licensed, practicing educators in a public school setting
- Must possess an L1 other than English
- Must have attended a primary school (K-12) outside of the United States
- Must have come to the United States and completed their (K-12) education and beyond in the United States

### **4.2 Protocol**

Interview Protocol was the instrument of choice for this study. The interviews are semi-structured with questions developed before conducting the interviews. Other questions were asked depending either upon the answers provided, or topics that arose during the interview and is a

strategy supported by the research literature (Creswell, 2013).

Research from Denzin and Lincoln (2011) contends narratives, gathered via interviews, can be utilized to illustrate lived experiences. The purpose is to make sense of personal experiences, in relation to cultural Discourses, a key component of this study. Researchers who utilize in-depth interviews as their primary method of gathering data, do so with the intention of paying close attention to the interviewee's linguistic practices (word choice, repetition, hesitation, laughter, and use of personal pronouns). Regardless of whether or not detailed transcripts are created, the role of personal experience and cultural interpretations are an avenue into what Polat (2013) describes as a "vital window" (p. 70). Because researchers cannot see directly into the minds of learners to explore their thoughts, feelings, and motivations, *interviewers* provide that *vital window*.

Transformation of the interviewee/interviewer relationship into one of narrator/listener is at the heart of interviewing. Researchers Gubrium and Holstein (2009) refer to this new relationship as one of "coconstruction" – where the interviewer and interviewee actively participate in the construction of the interviewees' stories. It is a hybrid approach that can be used to mine and explore the interaction occurring, while utilizing the full biographical, social, and political resources that present themselves to motivate greater responses and follow-up questions (Melles, 2005). Interviews are performative in nature. Interviewer and interviewee actively construct some version of the world appropriate to what is taken to be self-evident about the people to whom the interviewer is speaking and the context of the questions being asked (Silverman, 2001).

This is important because the inner representations inferred from talking or writing is non-cognitivism in nature (Potter, 1996). That is to say they are not truth-apt; they (interviewees) take you into their world at least as far as they can or choose to by verbally relating what's on their minds (Rossman and Rallis, 1998). Thus, Gubrium and Holstein (2009) suggest that understanding what gets said requires an ethnographic understanding of local contexts and interactional circumstances to avoid cultural reporting as opposed to cultural critique.

### 4.3 Data Collection

Data collection followed the data collection activities associated with narrative inquiry. Researcher Chase (2011) as reported in Denzin & Lincoln (2011) defines narrative research as a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through shaping or ordering of experience to understand one's own action for the purpose of constructing meaning. To that end, individuals who fit the detailed criteria were asked by the researcher for permission to obtain access for the purposes of researching their lived experiences in school (Creswell, 2013). To assure an environment and time frame that was both comfortable for and conducive to the subject answering the interview questions, interviews took place at the subjects' convenience. All of the subjects were asked the same questions (provided ahead of time), and follow-up questions were asked based upon responses. All interviews were conducted in English. Following, are the questions asked of the subjects and their respective rationales.

### 4.4 Interview Questions and Rationales

The following questions were constructed based upon Gees (2014) building task definition of identity in which he asks, "What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact? What identity or identities is this piece of language attributing to others and how does this help the speaker or writer enact his own identity?" (p. 34).

- Question 1: *What was the essence of your experiences at school?*
  - Rationale: The purpose of this question was to elicit a holistic view of [said subjects] schooling experience. In asking about the "essence" of their experiences, the researcher was seeking properties and/or attributes of their experiences so that central themes, or background, could be identified. Deeper exploration could be done by elaborating on the interview questions or by asking questions of those themes that emerged during the course of the interview (Brown & Durrheim, 2009).

- Question 2: *What was the role of language in your experiences at school?*
  - Rationale: The topic of this question served as an opportunity to open the discussion to language and explore the lived experiences of [said subject] in American schools while acquiring a new language. The schooling experience plays a pivotal role in shaping the cultural identity of new immigrants, and these experiences, coupled with language acquisition, could yield central themes. It also could allow their voices to be heard and *perceived* cultural identity to come to light (Costa & Kiss, 2011).
- Question 3: *What did a typical day at school look like when you were a student?*
  - Rationale: This query allowed [said subject] to give voice to their everyday lived experiences in school. In asking of their everyday experiences in school, central themes, associated with their schooling, emerged. From the shared experiences, other questions, based on these experiences (facts), emerged and allowed for greater opportunities to share and further empower perceived cultural identity (Chenail, 2011).
- Question 4: *In what language do you primarily speak and think?*
  - Rationale: The formulation of this question sought to allow [said subject] to discuss the role language has had on school experiences. Furthermore, it was designed to allow [said subject] to elaborate on the role language has had on their development as a member of society and as a member of the Mexican/American culture at home, and at school (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).
- Question 5: *What did you feel when you were a student?*
  - Rationale: In asking [said subject] about their feelings as a student, the opportunity was presented for a rich, detailed story that provides the opportunity to explore the emotional journey experienced as a Mexican in American schools. Feelings are

powerful indicators of decision making. Thus, to hear and see the role feelings from school have played in their major life decisions could provide invaluable insights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

- Question 6: *What did you think others thought of you when you were a student?*
  - Rationale: The intention of this question was to allow participants to expound upon their self-perceptions and further elaborate on their feelings. Personal perception reflects a component of the empowerment people feel both culturally and individually (Creswell, 2013). A person's perceptions of themselves and explorations of those perceptions could reveal insights into their lived experiences, feelings, emotions, and creation of their cultural identity within the context of the tensions they experienced.
- Question 7: *What, if any, parallels can you draw between your educational environment and the educational environment of today's students?*
  - Rationale: This question was designed to gain insight into the parallels that former ELL students (who are now educators) recognize and what consciously or unconsciously classroom practices they employ to aid the sub-population of students who share their personal histories. Furthermore, it allows for recommendations related to classroom and curriculum considerations (Pawan & Craig, 2011).

#### **4.5 Responding to Non-Responsive Answers**

Occasionally, a non-responsive answer or what can be interpreted as an incomplete answer occurred. It was the responsibility of the researcher to delve deeper and ask open-ended follow up questions that elicited full and complete responses. Open-ended follow up questions began with, “Who”, “What”, “When”, “Where” and “How”. The word “Why” was either used judiciously or avoided if possible, due to it conveying the notion of a right or wrong answer (Chenail, 2011).



## 5. ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Qualitative Overview

Twelve participants who fit the criteria for this study and were both willing and available were interviewed over the course of three months. Each participant was asked seven questions which totaled 84. Total interview time was 601 minutes with the longest being 67 minutes and the shortest 39 minutes. This resulted in a median time of 48 minutes for the interviews and a mode of 39 minutes.

Nine females and three males participated in the study. Teaching experience ranged from three years to twenty years with a median of nine years and a mode of three years. One participant in the study was from high school (grades 9-12), eight were from middle school (grades 6-8), and three from the elementary (grades K-5). Four school districts from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas were represented in the study each with similar demographics to YRISD (see Table 1) (Texas Education Agency, 2015b).

**Table 1**

**Participating District Demographics**

	<b>Hispanic Student Population</b>	<b>ELL Student Population</b>
YRISD	99.6%	48.3%
District A	99.8%	53.6%
District B	98.1%	30.2%
District C	98.8%	30.4%

While detailed notes were taken and conversations recorded to ensure fidelity, only the most relevant responses to the questions were transcribed. These transcriptions are referred to as “Illustrative Statements” (see Appendices A-L). Illustrative statements totaled 228, including final thoughts, with the fewest number of illustrative statements equaling 13 and the largest equaling 31. This resulted in a median of 18 illustrative statements per interview and a mode of 18.

Total words transcribed with regards to the aforementioned illustrative statements were equal to 7,770 – the longest transcription was 982 words and the shortest 398 words resulting in a median transcription word count of 548 with a mode of 556. Also of note, with regards to the paralinguistic nature of interviews, these are not considered in the theme of this study because some interviews happened face to face, and others via telephone. Thus, this is not a feature that can be reported.

Citing John Beverly (2005) researchers Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe Latin *testimonios* (testimonies) as emergency narratives that involve repression, poverty, marginality, exploitation, or survival. These narratives take the form of an “I” identity that demands to be recognized and wants to stake a claim on the attention of the listener. The contexts in which the ELL educators’ identities are analyzed utilizing Discourse analysis fall into two main categories: home and school. It is the convergence of these two contexts and the identities therein, that provide the details and foundation for this study.

## **5.2 Home and the “N” Identity**

All humans are born into their initial Discourse – a way of belonging to the family and community in a culturally accepted way. This initial Discourse sets the foundation for the “everyday” non-specialized language and the specific language used academically or professionally in life (Gee, 2014b). In each of the 12 subjects interviewed, initial Discourse plays an important foundational role in the way the participants perceived themselves not only as people, but as students in a classroom setting. Each participant interviewed associated the Spanish language with academic instruction. It was their primary language (L1). Once they entered American schools, they were inundated with

feelings of inferiority, fear, and low self-esteem as they encountered the L2 (English).

Consider the following illustrative statements from participants in the study:

*Subject Number One: "I just felt, I don't know how to explain it, but, 'impotente' [powerless]."*

*Subject Number Four: "I couldn't be who I was. I couldn't show if I was a smart girl or not, because I couldn't communicate."*

*Subject Number Seven: "I really think it was survival. Trying to survive."*

*Subject Number Nine: "Getting up, praying to God, that uh, hopefully, I don't read in front of the class. Hopefully, they don't call me to answer something."*

Language is an extension of who people are and what they project to others in the shared society. It is based upon the culture and heritage one is born into and a powerful component of self-esteem. A child's first experience with the world of language comes from his or her parents. Consider then, the paradox that emerges as they enter school not comprehending the English language (L2), nor understanding the culture of an American school.

While [Latino] families value education and literacy, teaching their own children is not part of their culture. These families rely on the educational system of their adopted community to prepare their children for settings involving literacy (Heath, 1982). It should come as no surprise that those feelings of inferiority, fear, and low self-esteem permeate the initial Discourse of ELL students as they struggle to acquire their L2.

A paradox emerges as a direct result of the values instilled at home and the expectations of the school. Researcher Cuban (2001) defines values as an enduring and desirable belief that we have about something – an idea, a quality, an action, or a means of getting a task completed. The following illustrative statements shed light on the paradoxical nature of the expectations from parents and schools:

*Subject Number Three: "I didn't have a role model in my life. My dad and my mom were divorced. My mom spent most of her time working two jobs. My dad was living in Mexico and I never had any relationship with him."*

*Subject Number Six: "My dad, uh, since I was little, he always put in my head that you have to be someone. You have to go to college."*

*Subject Number Eight: “My mother would just send us to school. And, it was understood, that it was our responsibility to be obedient and to comply with the teacher’s instructions.”*

*Subject Number Ten: “My dad, you know, worked in the fields, then as a mechanic, and he always said, I don’t want you to be like me. I don’t want you to be like me, ‘No quiero que trabajes como un burro’ (I don’t want you working like a donkey).”*

From a holistic viewpoint, values, feelings, and expectations, or lack thereof, from parents and schools compound the already complex and conflicting considerations of the initial discourse or “N” identity. This conundrum is referred to as a “satisfice” – in order to satisfy we must sacrifice (Simon, 1952). For an ELL student, recently arrived in American schools, the following question emerges: “What part of my “N” identity do I sacrifice to satisfy my need to acquire the English language and assimilate into the American culture?”

That conundrum is succinctly summarized by the thoughts of participant number one:

*“You feel tiny, tiny, tiny, when you don’t know the language.”*

### **5.3 School and “I” Identity**

Discourses that occur outside of the home are called secondary Discourses (Gee, 2014). These secondary Discourses often occur in any public arena: businesses, organizations, and schools. The common expectation is that over time both the primary and secondary Discourses will converge and come into alignment with one another to produce socially, culturally, and personally acceptable ways of speaking, acting, and doing.

Educators who do not recognize both Discourses have a limited view of students and often attribute it to their students having “underdeveloped” or “no background knowledge” (Fiano, 2013). In fact, it is not that they are underdeveloped or lacking – they simply have different knowledge than the teacher and a different Discourse than the school. A student’s knowledge is grounded in their lived experiences and from the environment of their initial Discourse. The following illustrative statements support the aforementioned differentiation:

*Subject Number Two: “I took language as, okay this is something that I have to master, now. I already knew how to speak. I already know how to read. I already know how to write. But, I know how to do it in Spanish.”*

*Subject Number Five: “You were required to speak the English language, the secondary language, no ‘ifs’ ‘ands’ or ‘buts.’ At the beginning you were taught the [language] basics.”*

*Subject Number Eleven: “The lack of knowing, not knowing the English language, was what was holding me down. That was the ball and chain. And, once I realized that I could get rid of it, and I could, then I felt very empowered. I could say what I wanted to. If I didn’t feel comfortable saying it out loud, verbally, I could write it!”*

*Subject Number Twelve: “I went to school but I didn’t see a purpose to it. Like, I didn’t see why I’d go. I didn’t see a goal – I didn’t have a goal – and I didn’t have an incentive. I didn’t have, like a motive, to keep on going for the most part.”*

From a Latino perspective, the “I” identity is an authorized position, ascribed by the institution, or achieved by the individual. Furthermore, Latinos view them as “expectations” that institutions (i.e. schools) create that need to be fulfilled (Andrews, 2013). The identity of being a student involves being a certain type of student, who utilizes a certain type of language. As the “I” identity emerges, it can and often does conflict with the values and language of the “N” identity learned at home (Gee, 2014b).

Therefore, as ELL students begin to traverse this new culture and practice enacting their new identity(s) within it, educators must remain cognizant that to truly understand ELLs, they must move beyond the expectation of ELLs *just* acquiring the language. Participants in any society use not only language, but also distinctive ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and dressing as they interact with their new environments (Gee, 2014; 2014b). It is reasonable and prudent then to expect educational institutions, as they interact with ELLs, to construct the “I” identity, to be considerate of the feelings, the interactions with other students, and the language proficiency of their ELLs as *they* interact with them.

It is critical that classroom teachers have knowledge of their student’s contexts, outside of school, to create a learning environment that is conducive to broadening the ELL students’ primary Discourse, while also fostering the growth of the secondary Discourse (Genishi, 1981).

This critical consideration is clearly espoused by subject number six:

*“You know and you feel it - when a teacher wanted to help you.*

#### 5.4 The Convergence of the “N” and “I” Identities

Where the “N” and “I” identities link for ELL students is a critical component of classroom instruction, particularly for middle-school ELL students. Dual-language programs tend to cease after elementary with all instruction and testing occurring in English (Block, 2011a). Researchers Joyce and Showers (2002) report how we teach is connected with what we teach and *who* we teach. This supports research by Gee (2014) who states that not only must the student adapt to the school Discourse, but the school must adapt to and value the students Discourse.

The confluence of the “N” and “I” identities is what this study will pinpoint as the origin of the “D” identity. The “D” identity is defined as an individual trait ascribed (i.e. assigned) or achieved by the individual (Andrews, 2013). Therefore, this study suggests while the “D” identity is a consequence of the “N” and “I” identities converging – it is the environment (i.e. the school) and more importantly the classroom instructors who have the greatest impact on the formation of the “D” identity. The illustrative statements of several participants in the study support this line of thinking:

*Subject Number One: “When there’s a teacher that believes in you, you feel more comfortable.”*

*Subject Number Eight: “She (the American teacher) saw potential in me. And, she believed I was capable of accomplishing something. She told me, ‘You’re college material!’”*

*Subject Number Nine: “I also had really good teachers that motivated me.”*

*Subject Number Eleven: “‘He did paddle me’ (the principal for supposedly speaking Spanish) – ‘He did.’ And then the teacher told me, she took me to her room, she said, ‘You know one day it’s not going to be like this. This is gonna stop one of these days.’ That’s when I learned the word, este, ‘discrimination.’ She told me, she said, and she hugged me, she said, ‘It’s not fair what happened to you’ and she said ‘But, it’s going to change. It’s going to change one of these days.’ And that kept me going.”*

The transfer of Discourses between contexts is no different than the transfer of learning between contexts, which is an imperative component of understanding and learning in general. There is a paradigmatic shift that must occur in classrooms whose populations are primarily ELL students. The catalyst of which must be the recognition that homogeneity is not and should not be a factor in the education of ELL students. Recognition of the different discourses and an understanding of those discourses is the *systemic* change that must occur.

Once again, this is not a call for wholesale teaching style changes. It should be a call for greater *empathy* with regards to the many circumstances ELLs experience as students. The defining characteristics presented earlier undoubtedly point to the conclusion that the figured world of any ELL student is in fact, their reality. Being cognizant that these “figured worlds” are not similar, educators lend themselves to greater understanding, greater clarity, and deeper empathy for the Discourses that ELLs bring to the classroom.

The knowledge that accompanies greater clarity, not only more positively influences the “D” discourse, but can also serve as the basis for success with language acquisition and further educational attainment. The illustrative statements that follow support this contention:

*Subject Number One: “The way you treat a student, an ELL specifically, the way you make him or her feel, the way you believe in them, and you show that, that you actually believe in them, is how you’re gonna set up the way they’re going to succeed.”*

*Subject Number Six: “You have to make them believe in themselves. Some of these students don’t believe they can do it. And, they believe it after a while – if you keep telling them, and telling them.”*

*Subject Number Seven: “If the student is not comfortable in their own skin, in their own language, um, they won’t be as conducive to learning.”*

*Subject Number Nine: “We need more training for the teachers. Not only how to get to the students, but also how to understand them. ‘Why are they quiet?’ ‘How come they don’t want to participate?’”*

## **5.5 Reliability and Validity**

Regarding conformational and reliable data, a professional development session was conducted for determining the validity and reliability of these data. Additionally, a measure of importance to educators of ELL students, perceived definition, and applicability to classrooms was sought.

A total of 36 participants from Yellow Rose Independent School District participated in a one-day professional development training session. Of the 36 participants, thirty-three were female and three were male, representing grades PK – 5. Out of YRISD’s 23 elementary campuses, 18 (or 78%) were represented during this session, and each representative was a Bilingual education instructor who utilized the districts 50:50 dual language program for instruction. Additionally, the

districts three Bilingual Supervisors (elementary, middle, and high school), various elementary campus administrators, and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction were present to assist and participate in the study from an observatory perspective.

Participants were presented with the purpose of the session, a brief, albeit foundational definition of Discourse Analysis, selection criteria, as well as the four identities used To determine the Discourse of the subjects in this study. Participants in the session were tasked with the following: (1) Examine the lived academic experiences of an ELL educator that shares Spanish-speaking ELL children's backgrounds; (2) Utilize the illustrative comments to target the identity that allowed the educator to be successful and discuss how to utilize it with today's ELL students.

The participants in the session were randomly selected, via card drawing, to join one of twelve groups (one group per subject in the study). Each group consisted of three members who were given the following directions: (1) As a group read the questions and illustrative statements for *your* assigned subject; (2) As a group consider the four identities and choose the identity your group feels best fits the *overall* illustrative statements; (3) As a group utilize the chart paper provided to create a poster that illustrates the identity your group chose and why it's important for your subject. Each group was given 90 minutes to complete the task (including a 15 minute break at each groups' discretion) with the researcher and field based mentor available to answer and clarify any questions.

## **5.6 Research Findings**

Illustrative statements totaled 228 (including any final thoughts participants may have added) and these were analyzed to determine which Discourse identity was most prevalent based upon these declarations. The researcher's findings and the results of the participants in the professional development session are detailed in Table 2.



**Table 2**

**Researcher / Participant Statistical Comparison**

<b>Discourse Identity</b>	<b>Researcher Findings</b>	<b>PD Group Findings</b>
N – Identity	33%	28%
I – Identity	36%	37%
D – Identity	27%	32%
A – Identity	4%	2%
Total	100%	99%*

\*One group did not evaluate “Final Thoughts” for their subject

While the statistical variance in the percentages between the researcher’s findings and the participant’s findings are evident, the enlightening aspect is that the educators identified the “N”, “I” and “D” Discourses as the most impactful for their subject’s identity. Additionally, the “A” identity was not seen as a major precursor in either analysis to the formation of the educator’s Discourse. These findings underscore the notion of “permeability” discussed earlier and lend some degree of correlation to these findings.

While certainly correlation does not imply causation, the triangulation of these data via qualitative measurement, quantitative measurement, and discourse analysis lead to a more reliable, valid, and replicable study. Patton (2001) advocates the use of triangulation by stating, “Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 247). Golafshani (2003) solidifies this line of thinking with his research which finds that engaging in multiple methods, including, observation, interviews and recordings, will result in a more valid, reliable, and diverse construction of realities.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this ethnographic study of ELL educators with similar backgrounds of ELL students was to discover new instructional insights based on the educators' lived experiences. The analysis of these experiences was viewed through the proverbial lens of Gee's (2014, 2014b) theory of Discourse analysis. This research examined and disseminated the lived experiences of former ELL students, who are now educators, as they developed the identity(s) so critical to their language acquisition and ascension in education. This development occurred between home and school and highlights the importance of schools in this development, particularly the role of the teacher. Furthermore, this study extends the importance of previous Discourse studies as conducted by Andrews (2013), Fiano (2013), Gee (2014) and Gee (2014b).

With the lived experiences of these ELL educators examined, we can now ask ourselves, "What new instructional insights can be gathered and utilized in the classroom?" First, the subjects in this study sought to navigate the co-construction of their identity with varying degrees of difficulty. While the school agenda was the attainment of the English language for instruction and testing, the subjects sought attainment of the language for social purposes first and educational purposes second. Being a part of the group of students who were either Spanish speakers or English speakers; participants in the ELL classes or regular classes; was a recurring theme in this study. Their need and desire to express themselves and to show themselves as intelligent was overwhelming and led them to either harder work or isolation. This sentiment is supported by Lee and Jeong (2013) who believe that only by gaining the confidence to share experiences in the L1 or the L2 will the bridge between language domains be crossed and language acquired.

Second, with regards to the type of instructional program utilized with ELL students, YRISD formally adopted a 50:50 Dual Language program in the 2013-2014 school year. Students entering the sixth grade in the 2014-2015 school year were the first group of pupils who had participated in

this program since PK – long before the formal adoption. This resulted in DRMS experiencing the record number of ELL students detailed earlier.

According to multiple sources (Block, 2011a; Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Lindholm-Leary & Hernandez, 2011; Quintanar-Sarellana, 2004) the disadvantages of a 50:50 dual-language program outweigh the benefits. In the 50:50 model students receive half of their instruction in English and the other half in the partner language throughout their elementary years. The resulting effect is instruction and academic language that is not supported by the contextual clues so critical to obtaining a language. That is to say, language becomes the object of learning and not the medium of instruction (Lee & Jeong, 2013). The salient point is this: educators must accept that language acquisition is a fluid rather than stoic process and the environment, in which the L2 is obtained, specifically with regards to student Discourse, is critical for ELL student success.

Finally, how do districts and educators therein, ensure students gain the confidence they need to be successful? How do the aforementioned educational institutions foster the growth of the “D” identity and respect the fluid process of language acquisition? Moreover, how do they make this applicable to the classroom?

These measures of importance, perceived definition, and applicability to classrooms were the key outcomes from the professional development session with the YRISD teachers. As it related to measures of importance, the general consensus was the need for further understanding of ELL learning and new instructional insight was critical for the academic success of ELLs In YRISD (Personal Communication, July 30, 2015). This was evident not only in the written responses from the professional development session, but the recorded interviews and the additional comments made at the conclusion of those interviews (Trochim, 2006).

Additionally, the permission granted by the district to conduct the session, the attendance of the elementary instructors, building administrators’, and central office personnel, demonstrate the importance of this research. Considering the demographic information for YRISD, the state testing

data for DRMS and the objective is clear – ELLs are the population serviced and learning how to best educate them is critical for *all* student success.

The perceived definition was discussed at length during the debriefing period of the professional development session. The consensus was ELLs are students who are not fluent in Spanish; not fluent in English; and have difficulty understanding the expectations and instructions for learning the academics and mastering the language; this definition was deemed acceptable as the researchers Lindholm-Leary & Block (2010) came to similar conclusions. This lack of fluency was felt by all instructors, across the curriculum and grade levels, and has led to feelings of what participants described as “desperation, confusion, frustration, and urgency” (Personal Communication, July 30, 2015).

Simultaneously, the twelve groups constructed questions and comments that they wanted to know more about as it pertained to the research and the findings. From that discussion, during the debriefing, several issues were discussed that teachers felt would clear the fog of dissonance and aid them in the development and selection of new curriculum activities in the future.

The participants formulated the following questions to ask not only of themselves, but of the activities they utilize daily in constructing the “D” identity: (1) How do I think this student *feels* about being in my class?; (2) What is this student’s language *proficiency*?; (3) How does this student socially interact with other *students*?; (4) How does this student socially interact with *me*?; (5) How can I *adapt* my teaching to best service this student’s needs (see Appendix M)?

The development of these questions allows educators to consider students beyond the expectations and confines of curriculum. These questions allow for the experiences ELL students bring with them to the classroom to be considered, incorporated into the learning and the construction of the “D” identity.

Teachers teach the way they were taught – of that we can be certain (see Karathanos, 2009; Bandura, 1986; Nespor, 1987). That is part of the schools Dissonance, reality, and figured world.

When educators begin to consider feelings, interactions, proficiency levels, and what's best for their students they become enlightened. Insights and understanding about the identities ELL students bring to school, how school respects those identities, and the considerable influence it has on an ELL student, can impact that student for a lifetime. The following illustrative statements echo these sentiments:

*Subject Number Eight: "There's a great need to become advocates for this group of ESL students."*

*Subject Number Nine: "We all need to be in agreement. Administrators, teachers, everybody, need to project the same thing: 'Hey, being bilingual is good!'"*

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study would be incomplete without consideration for the ramifications of its findings for any educational institution whose population includes ELL students. Educators and curriculum facilitators need to be aware of the influence the “N” identity has on student’s self- esteem and language acquisition. If not respected and not utilized to help with the acquisition of their L2, ELL students will retreat and resist learning the second language. This study suggests an awareness of the “N” identity aids in making the curriculum utilized for teaching ELLs more contextual, more appropriate, and more conducive to the culture, heritage, and socioeconomic realities of ELL students. Additionally, it makes learning the fundamentals of the L2 more enticing and increasing the likelihood of academic attainment and achievement for this ever increasing population of students.

Furthermore, this study calls for educational institutions to be fully aware of their role in the formation of the “I” identity in their interactions with and expectations of ELL students. Educational institutions must grant their ELLs a margin of freedom to express themselves and build up their L1 so that the need for acquiring the L2 is not seen as an attack on their culture or as indifference to their “N” identity. Rather they should view it as a way to increase their academic achievement and language acquisition. These are *transfronterizo* students whose culture and way of life are important to them – they should be of equal importance to educators as well.

In similar fashion, educators must be equally aware of their role as facilitators in the convergence of the “N” and the “I” identity which forms the “D” Discourse. This juncture is where the traits and achievements of the individual are directly influenced by educators, both positively and/or negatively. It is where the students become cognizant of language acquisition as a tool to further their learning and better their families; as opposed to something required of them to graduate from school. In other words, it is where they feel respected and nurtured

enough to work hard now, for success in the future. It is anticipated that the previous research, the illustrative statements, and conclusions from educators of ELL students, that a need for awareness, compassion, consideration, and collegiality is paramount to ELL student success.

Despite the benefits and ramifications of this research, there are some limitations. As a result of the ethnographic nature of this research and its qualitative data, there will be questions of reliability, credibility, and validity. These considerations were carefully considered and steps were taken to assure credibility and dependability of these data.

Finally, with regards to limitations, there is the issue of race. This study was limited to an examination of Mexicans, from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, whose shared culture, heritage, and lived experiences made this study so vivid. Generalizability beyond the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, beyond the Mexican culture, limits the transferability of these findings to other students in other areas, with different socioeconomic conditions, language barriers, and cultural backgrounds.

Accepting Mishler's (1986) critical thinking about interviewing entails accepting that focusing on the way questions and answers are constructed (and retrospectively analyzed) is at the core of qualitative inquiry and consequently, fact gathering interviews. Kvale (1996) solidifies this acceptance when he states, "If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them? The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, [to] unfold their experiences, [to] uncover their lived world" (p. 1).

The study was derived from the researcher's experiences teaching in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. While the pedagogical knowledge and research associated with ELL education has increased, YRISD and DRMS have regressed and continue to experience record numbers of ELL students. The anticipated utilization of this research is this: to utilize the lived educational experiences of educators with similar backgrounds to broaden the perspectives and methods, namely Discourse analysis, to bridge the academic gap of ELL students in American classrooms. This shift in thinking will only come about if researchers and educators seek to understand the educational

world from the perspective of those who have lived that which research seeks to unfold. In doing so, a new foundation for educating ELL students and assisting with their language acquisition will be perceived not as a burden, but as a mutually beneficial learning experience for all involved.



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## **APPENDICES**



## APPENDIX A

1. (5) Illustrative Comments
  - “I wasn’t ready to be here.”
  - “Survive. At least the first year. Or, the first week, like my mom said.”
  - “After the school year I just wanted to stay here and not just survive; but succeed.”
  - “You don’t look the same and you know that you’re not the same. Because I don’t know the language. I don’t know how to communicate myself. I didn’t know how to ask to go to the restroom, because I wasn’t prepared for that.”
  - “You feel tiny, tiny, tiny, when you don’t know the language.”
2. (2) Illustrative Statements
  - “Emotionally. Because, I mean like I said, I wasn’t able to communicate. I wanted to learn. I wanted to read. And it’s not like you don’t know how to read, it’s just that you don’t know the vocabulary.”
  - “Yeah, it helped me that I had already a foundation in my native language. A really good foundation. But still, I wasn’t ready to just jump out in an English class.”
3. (4) Illustrative Comments
  - “The first year, horrible days.”
  - “I just felt, I don’t know how to explain it, but, ‘impotente’ [powerless].”
  - “You want to do so many things, and you just feel locked. You have something that is just keeping you there and you’re not able to move. You’re not able to socialize the way you want to socialize. You’re not able to go and explore whatever you want to do, because you’re lacking the language.”
  - “When there’s a teacher that believes in you, you feel more comfortable.”
4. “Definitely in Spanish.”
5. (2) Illustrative Statements
  - “I believe, as a student, I felt that I was just learning how to pass the TAKS, instead of *learning* a lot of vocabulary.”
  - “I never felt myself to be part of a classroom, where I was actually learning the language – the English language.”
6. “I had so many [teachers] that said I was never going to be able to graduate from high school. And, that if I graduated from high school that was going to be the highest achievement that I was going to have.”
7. (2) Illustrative Statements
  - “I want to be that kind of teacher; the one that I had when I was a student - and believe in them.”

- “We still have those kinds of teachers, and I see them in my campus, that do not believe in the kids.”

8. Final Thoughts

- “The way you treat a student, an ELL specifically, the way you make him or her feel, the way you believe in them, and you show that, that you actually believe in them, is how you’re gonna set up the way they’re going to succeed.”

## APPENDIX B

1. (4) Illustrative Statements
  - “For me, going through school, I always felt that, when there’s a will, there’s a way.”
  - “I was very self-directed. I liked to learn.”
  - “I always had that little urge to learn.”
  - “I’ve always wondered what was out there. What was out there for me?”
2. (4) Illustrative Statements
  - “I took language as, okay this is something that I have to master, now. I already knew how to speak. I already know how to read. I already know how to write. But, I know how to do it in Spanish.”
  - “I guess the hardest thing for me to master was my pronunciation.”
  - “I know some of my ESL teachers, I mean, they would push us a lot: ‘You know, you need to practice!’”
  - “I mean, you have to want it. To be able to get it. Or, be good at it. Or, get better at it.”
3. (2) Illustrative Statements
  - “Having to adapt to different routines and different language and a different everything – it was kind of hard to get used to it. I know at the beginning it was hard and I would cry and I would feel bad. Because, I mean, you go through a lot when you’re trying to adapt to a new environment and a new school and everything. And, the new language – it’s a little overwhelming.”
  - “Having a strong foundation in my first language really helped me get the English language faster.”
4. “Spanish – it’s just natural to me – expressing my feelings – I feel it’s easier for me to use the Spanish.”
5. (2) Illustrative Statements
  - “At the beginning, it was really hard. I felt really frustrated. Sometimes I would tell my mom that I wanted to go back. That I didn’t like it.”
  - “Sometimes you feel like people don’t see that full potential in you, because they see that language deficiency [in] you.”
6. (3) Illustrative Statements
  - “They (teachers) didn’t know how much I knew because there was that language barrier at the beginning.”
  - “My classmates, sometimes they would make fun of you, because you didn’t know how to speak English correctly.”

- “I was embarrassed to speak up or answer, because I knew I didn’t know how to pronounce it correctly or explain.”

#### 7. (3) Illustrative Statements

- “Today we have so many resources.”
- “Some of these kids don’t know how to value it (resources), or how to appreciate it, cause they’ve always had it.”
- “As a student, there was a lot of respect, a lot of value in school. And students were respectful to teachers. And I don’t see that going on much anymore. And, it’s sad. Because now it’s more like teachers have to tailor their classroom environment for their students – but it’s not only because of their academic needs – but because of their behavioral needs. Their attitudes. The attitudes they have towards education. I see a lot of people not giving education the value that it merits.”

#### 8. Final Thoughts

- “I want to show them it can be done, but they have to want it to. And, they have to work. And, it’s not going to come easy. They have to act. They have to give something to get it in return.”

## APPENDIX C

### 1. (2) Illustrative Comments

- “My essence in school, my childhood, was that I had to learn everything by myself. I had to learn how to do things right and wrong. How to keep myself going – to – so that I can proceed in being successful. I didn’t have a role model in my life. My dad and my mom were divorced. My mom spent most of her time working two jobs. My dad was living in Mexico and I never had any relationship with him.”
- “If I failed, I blamed it on myself because it was only me and myself that I had, to get above, and learn from my own self. Sometimes, I couldn’t even rely on the teachers, cause some of the teachers wouldn’t care.”

### 2. (2) Illustrative Comments

- “I basically based my language in Spanish. Since mostly, here in La Joya, all teachers, mostly all teachers, know Spanish. And, for me, none of them actually said, ‘You only have to speak English’ – not even my English teachers. Sometimes, I would answer everything in Spanish and they would be fine with it as long as I was right.”
- “It hurt me. In the fact that I never properly learned either of these languages. But, at the same time, I am benefitting from it because I kept both languages at bay. And I know how to speak properly in Spanish and English. But, not to the one hundred percent, that if I would have said, ‘Oh, you know what; I’m only going to focus on English. I’m gonna learn one hundred percent grammar. One hundred percent how to speak it properly’ – I don’t. I know it like seventy and seventy; which is something that will get me by if I’m ever asked to speak only Spanish or speak only English.”

### 3. (3) Illustrative Comments:

- “Then, I would go to class. But, I didn’t pay much attention. Because most of the classes I would have to wait for people because I’m usually the first one to finish. Cause, I like challenging [myself] to be the first. I wouldn’t like to get beat from somebody else. I would finish first and most of the time I’d be right – very rarely would I be wrong. And then, from there, I would just wait for athletics.”
- “If it wasn’t for sports, I would not pay attention in class or care about my grades. Sports was the one thing that kept me in check.”
- “Bored. Not challenged. Most of the time I’d be like three or four days ahead of the class. So, I would feel bored most of the time – from my middle school years to my high school years. I wouldn’t focus that much in school because most of the time I already knew everything.”

### 4. (2) Illustrative Comments:

- “I feel more comfortable speaking Spanish.”
- “Most of the time, since I’m speaking Spanish, I try to remember the concept in Spanish. So, as I’m more comfortable speaking Spanish than English – because I use it

more daily, then English – because most of the people I know understand Spanish. So, I’m more comfortable speaking Spanish. So, when I’m thinking about it (a concept or lesson to be taught) I’m thinking on the ways, ‘Oh, how can I explain this in Spanish?’ And then, I translate it to English, and then from there I revise it, and think about it *again* (emphasis intended) in English, and I already have what I’m going to teach [for] the concept or the lesson.”

5. “Most of the time I felt that I was on my own. Most of the time, more like on my own, uh, not able to trust anybody else. Cause, in my family, like you, the only people that you can trust is your blood. You cannot trust anybody else because you never know how they’re going to hurt you or they’re going to break you. And, as I grew up, I saw that you cannot trust anyone. Especially, with people and friends. So, I kept mostly to myself.”
6. (3) Illustrative Comments:
  - “I like to prove people wrong.”
  - “For me, I feel like I can prove them wrong. Yeah, you thought of me as a jock; you thought of me as somebody – high school – was gonna be my peak. But then I went to college – I graduated from college – And now here I am teaching on my third year. And, I feel like I have made something out of myself. Unlike other people. And, for me, that make me feel; PROVEN WRONG.
  - On going to college: “Dumb. We go back to the same word – dumb. I wasn’t good enough to pass to college – to be there – and prove to my family that I knew what I was doing.”
7. (3) Illustrative Comments:
  - “It’s going to be the technology.”
  - “Some of my students nowadays – they base themselves in what they find in the internet or what they can do texting. So, their grammar is really bad, and, they don’t know how to properly speak English because they use all these abbreviations, instead of actual words. And, they can’t write a sentence – a complete sentence – where back then I could *at least* (emphasis intended) do that.”
  - “The communication skills, that was back then, we’re losing it nowadays. Because everything nowadays is through technology. So, nowadays, you see the kids being more antisocial. Back then you had to speak to a person face to face. You had to have manners; you had to learn how to talk – how to write.”
8. FINAL THOUGHTS:
  - “Their standards are so low.”
  - “Knowing that you’re going to pass, regardless of what you get, or, regardless of whatever happens, that satisfaction for them is gone. Because they don’t have to push themselves to be an ‘A’ honor roll student or ‘B’ honor roll student.”

## APPENDIX D

1. (3) Illustrative Statements
  - “My only goal, as a 15 year old, was to learn how to speak English.”
  - “I couldn’t prove what I knew in history or what I knew in math.”
  - “I remember crying at night. Opening the dictionary and trying to find the words for my homework, because I couldn’t understand my homework. And that made me feel dumb; it made me feel ignorant.”
2. (4) Illustrative Statements
  - “I think it played an important role because it makes me who I am.”
  - “It made me very insecure.”
  - “I was embarrassed of my language, of course, and I was embarrassed of speaking Spanish in front of the preppy guys and preppy girls.”
  - “I couldn’t be who I was. I couldn’t show if I was a smart girl or not, because I couldn’t communicate.”
3. (4) Illustrative Statements
  - “So, I started 9<sup>th</sup> grade with an ESL class, where they would teach me verbs – words around our environment. They only taught me grammar and spelling words. But, not comprehension.”
  - “Even your own race sometimes makes you feel inferior.”
  - “Being around them (Spanish speaking peers) made me feel like there was a place where I belonged.”
  - “During the regular classes, I didn’t have any other friends. I was that girl in the corner who doesn’t speak. Or, the ‘quiet girl.’”
4. “I feel like I think in Spanish, but automatically I translate it into English. And sometimes I can’t find the words anymore in Spanish.”
5. (4) Illustrative Statements
  - “I felt that I was inferior.”
  - “I feel embarrassed speaking Spanish.”
  - “I felt like I couldn’t talk to the English kids.”
  - “It made me very different from others.”
6. (2) Illustrative Statements
  - “They would ask me something sometimes, but it was hard for me to understand. So, I would pretend that I didn’t listen. So, I guess they would think I was a Mexican – that I didn’t understand anything.”
  - “I don’t think they (peers) were interested in being my friend. I was there, kind of,

trying to be invisible around everybody.”

7. (3) Illustrative Statements

- “I think the parents nowadays are not the same type of parents that we had.”
- “The family that I grew up with, I think I had a better education with them; morals. They had better morals.”
- “The type of education we’re giving to them is *not* the type of education we want to give them.”



## APPENDIX E

1. (3) Illustrative Statements
  - “My goal was to be able to learn the second language within an academic year.”
  - “I wanted to be part of the group that spoke both languages. Or, the secondary language. So, what I would do, in essence, I created vocabulary cards. The pronunciation was written the way you would read it in Spanish, but it was actually pronouncing the word in English. So, that my accent would not be as heavy, or, it won’t be that type of an accent where it’s difficult to understand.
  - “I would categorize myself as a struggler at the beginning. It’s difficult for you to comprehend the new culture you’re getting yourself into.”
2. (3) Illustrative Statements
  - “The role of it was English only.”
  - “You were required to speak the English language, the secondary language, no ‘ifs’ ‘ands’ or ‘buts.’ At the beginning you were taught the [language] basics.”
  - “You were expected to practice the [English] language, to be able to defend yourself; at least for the necessities.”
3. (3) Illustrative Statements
  - “No Spanish. Only English.”
  - “I guess it has to do with the personality. I was not embarrassed when people would correct me for a mispronunciation. Or, I was not embarrassed to ask for help when I didn’t understand something. And, I think that’s what moved me forward.”
  - “My neighbor used to be an English teacher, before she retired, for so many years. She taught me many of the ELA rules and language rules. So, when our teacher would explain it to us in a classroom, I was already familiar with it.”
4. (2) Illustrative Statements
  - “I think in Spanish. I think of it in Spanish, and then I translated it.”
  - “That’s how I learned. To translate it in – view the sentences in my mind and then switch them into the English - and then speak it in English.”
5. “I was very comfortable. I was happy when I was attending school. I struggled the first few months, adjusting to the new lifestyle. Because, I was not used to living in the U.S. – but overall I was happy.”
6. “Within my bilingual class I was one of the first ones to move from bilingual to English only classes within one year. So, I didn’t really get to build a good relationship because I was moved into a regular classroom. So, I became friends of people that their primary language was English. So, I was able to blend in pretty fast. And, they were very good about helping me with my language barriers.”

## 7. Final Thoughts

- “We need to be more intentional with those kids. In order for them to be able to acquire that language, in a way, where they would be able to gain the significant knowledge to be able to defend themselves in real life situations.”

## APPENDIX F

### 1. (2) Illustrative Statements

- “When I was a student, I always wanted to be a professional, so that I could become self-reliant. When I was a child I knew what kind of person I want to become when I grow up.”
- “My dad, uh, since I was little, he always put in my head that you have to be someone. You have to go to college.”

### 2. (3) Illustrative Statements

- “I came without the knowledge of the English language. The language was not imperative for me to succeed. It was not easy. Because, I had to learn to listen in English – speak, read, and write in English.”
- Until I was placed in regular classes in high school – is when I start to feel part of the United States. Because, they needed to remove the label (ESL student).”
- “It’s different than the regular classes. Because you’re not with regular students. And, most of the time, you hear, you speak, Spanish with all the students. And, in a regular class, you have peers that speak more English.”

### 3. (2) Illustrative Statements

- “I always had good communication with my teachers – all the time – even though I was a little bit shy. Really, I was not *really* shy. I was just, um, cause of my accent.”
- “But, um, I was just a little quiet. Sometimes, I waited until, whenever I had a question, I waited until the end of the class to go and ask the teacher.”

### 4. (2) Illustrative Statements

- “I think in Spanish, but I speak in English.”
- “My first language is always going to be Spanish. How can you think in English when you’re first language was Spanish?”

### 5. (2) Illustrative Statements

- “When I was a student, in high school, I feel that I missed out on a lot of culture from this country. You not only have to learn the language, but, get used [to] unfamiliar values – food – the open mind of teachers and my peers.”
- “You know and you feel it. When a teacher wanted to help you.”

### 6. (2) Illustrative Statements

- “I think they (her parents) were proud of me. Cause, I was, after coming home from school, I always sit down with them and tell them the things that I did at school. And I think they were proud of me.”
- “And, my teachers always seen me as a very hard worker/student because I always give the best of me – and never gave up on anything.”

7. (4) Illustrative Statements

- “We have the same expectations. We expect our students to read on grade level – have a good comprehension.”
- “But, today education is more intensive than when I was a student.”
- “Before, they used to say, ‘Sink or Swim.’ Either you learn it or you’re gonna struggle. Now, it’s different.”
- “Opportunity – it’s an opportunity they’re giving you to decide.”

8. Final Thoughts

- “You have to make them believe in themselves. Some of these students don’t believe they can do it. And, they believe it after a while – *if* you keep telling them, and telling them.”

## APPENDIX G

### 1. (6) Illustrative Comments

- “I really think it was survival. Trying to survive.”
- “To be able to go to college. To be able to get an education, so, I can better my family.”
- “I had to isolate myself.”
- “Or, going to the library. Actually, the library; that was my safe haven.”
- “I was the translator. So, since 1987, since I was seven, I was talking, translating, you know, with the farmers and ranchers for my family.”
- “So, I had to be responsible in learning English. And, being able to learn as much as I can in school because in May, June, July, August, we would be traveling.”

### 2. (3) Illustrative Comments

- “Early on, like elementary years, I wanted to learn as much English as I could because I wanted to communicate to make friends.”
- “Actually, I learned English with ‘Ingles Sin Barreras’ – before cartoons.”
- “Because I was a U.S. Citizen, my dad automatically assumed that I knew English. It was kind of funny.”

### 3. (5) Illustrative Comments

- “My education was totally, all, in English. I was never taught in Spanish.”
- “It was organized chaos.”
- “It wasn’t really, like um, safe. You didn’t feel safe. You really had to watch out for yourself.”
- “I wanted to learn English.”
- “I didn’t have all the vocabulary I needed to communicate, effectively. I had to code switch from one language to the other. To be able to express myself, well.”

### 4. (3) Illustrative Comments

- “Now, I only speak in, well, primarily English; Speak and think in English.”
- “My Spanish is just, um, reading. Mostly reading.”
- “I made a decision that at home, I was going to stick to Spanish. And, at school, I was gonna speak English. And that’s part of my isolation as well. Because where I was growing up, the culture was you need to speak Spanish – and not English.”

### 5. (3) Illustrative Comments

- “It was a bit isolating and lonely at times.”
- “They (his peers) did not have the amount of responsibility that I had at home.”

6. (3) Illustrative Comments

- “I think others thought me quiet and reserved. Quiet and reserved.”
- “I had weak parenting. There wasn’t really any, ‘You should be doing this – You should be doing that’ – No, it was the opposite.”
- “They were in survival mode.”

7. (4) Illustrative Comments

- “It was much more difficult for myself.”
- “It was harder to get to school.”
- “They (ELLs) are more safe in the classroom, or, in school.”
- “Now, it is more conducive to learning.”

8. Final Thoughts

- “The Spanish language is not a negative – it’s a positive. That it’s something that you keep.”
- “If the student is not comfortable in their own skin, in their own language (Spanish), um, they won’t be as conducive to learning.”
- “There is not a very effective understanding of Bilingual Education. Teachers don’t have that very clear in their head.”
- “I’m developing their second language, while keeping their first language.”

## APPENDIX H

### 1. (6) Illustrative Statements

- “Frustration. It was extremely frustrated – not to be able to comprehend the language.”
- “When I immigrated I was already expected to know the language.”
- “But, in reality, I didn’t understand the language. I couldn’t read it. I couldn’t write it. I couldn’t speak it.”
- “I was a very shy, very quiet student.”
- “My mother would just send us to school. And, it was understood, that it was *our* responsibility to be obedient and to comply with the teacher’s instructions.”
- “I cried for a two week period. I cried every single day because of the cultural shock – and because no one would talk to me – and I felt very isolated and rejected.”

### 2. (3) Illustrative Statements

- “I realized that I needed to learn the language. Because learning that language was crucial to succeed.”
- “I was, suddenly, assigned the role of family secretary.”
- “I was forced to, you know, to see the *need* to learn the language in order to survive. In order to be able to get what you needed.”

### 3. “When I came here I felt like I was rejected because of my physical appearance. And, because of the way I dressed. Because it was obvious that I lived in poverty. And, because I *was* different than them.”

### 4. (3) Illustrative Statements

- “When I was a student, I would always *think* in Spanish, first. In order for me to understand the content of what I was reading – I would always do this – I would think in Spanish – I would try to understand it. And then later, I would go back to my reading, and then rethink in English.”
- “Now (as an adult), primarily I speak and think in English.”
- “And, more than anything, I remember that it was necessary for me to push myself to learn the language. In order to push myself, I had to try to immerse myself in the language in its entirety.”

### 5. (2) Illustrative Statements

- “We weren’t aware of all the difficulties we were going to face, because we weren’t competent in the language. We just had this idea, you know, that everyone who comes to America becomes successful.”
- “I felt desperate, so desperate, to learn the language. Because, I knew that I needed it in order to survive. Or, in order to become someone. Or, to do something in my life.”

6. (2) Illustrative Statements

- “My teacher saw potential in me. And, he thought I was smart. And, so, that gave me great hopes! And, that gave me a dream. That was the beginning of my dream.”
- “She saw potential in me. And, she believed I was capable of accomplishing something. She told me, ‘You’re college material.’”

7. (2) Illustrative Statements

- “I personally feel that the expectations they had for ESL students back in the 80’s were very low.”
- “A high percentage of our ESL population, live here with a family relative, or, with a friend of the family and they don’t have the support system.”

8. Final Thoughts

- “There’s a great need to become advocates for this group of ESL students.”
- “A language barrier shouldn’t dictate what you will become later in the future. It’s just a language barrier.”
- “An accent describes who you are and where you come from. And you should never be ashamed of who you are and where you come from.”



## APPENDIX I

### 1. (4) Illustrative Statements

- “When I came from Mexico – they retained me a year. I always had that [thought]: I’m a year behind. So, I was very persistent – Okay, I want to graduate early so I can graduate with the same age group.
- “I had a teacher, my first year here in the United States, that told me I was never going to graduate from high school. Instead of putting me down, it was my motivation to do better.”
- “My mom was a teacher, when we used to live in Mexico. She was a teacher and a principal. I always wanted to be a teacher, like my mom. I always wanted to be a principal.”
- “I also had really good teachers that motivated me.”

### 2. (3) Illustrative Statements

- “When I moved over here, that I was learning a new language, it was like super difficult. Cause I was actually not learning any content. For a whole year I was just learning vocabulary and a little bit of grammar. Not even grammar. Just vocabulary, that’s it. So basically I lost a whole year of instruction.”
- “I was really shy in class. I didn’t want to participate because of my accent; because I didn’t know how to speak English.”
- “It was very hard for me when I was in school. Because, first of all, the language. And then second, because I was getting bad grades. And, I wasn’t used to that.”

### 3. (4) Illustrative Statements

- “When I started school in the United States, it wasn’t good. It wasn’t something that I woke up and was like, ‘Okay, I want to go to school.’”
- “Like I said, I had a teacher, because we didn’t know English, she would make us feel like less of a person.”
- “I would not even pay attention in class because we’re reading by row. So, I know the third page was my turn. So, I was trying to re-read the whole page before it was my turn. That way, if I didn’t know how to say a word, I could figure it out, ask a friend. So, I wasn’t even paying attention to what others were reading because I didn’t want to mess up in front of the class.”
- “Getting up, praying to God, that uh, hopefully, I don’t read in front of the class. Hopefully, they don’t call me to answer something.”

### 4. “Now, sometimes, I don’t even remember, ‘Was I talking English? Or, was I talking in Spanish?’ I really don’t remember if the conversation was in English, or, was the conversation in Spanish? Now, I’m not thinking in Spanish. I’m just speaking English.”

5. “We were isolated. We were the ‘Mexicans.’ We weren’t valued back then. And I think they’re not valued right now either, cause you know, they’re ELL students.”
6. “I didn’t have a lot of friends. I was shy. I didn’t want to talk to anybody because I didn’t know the language.”
7. (3) Illustrative Comments
  - “I do think the teachers are not trained enough.”
  - “We need more training for the teachers. Not only how to get to the students, but also how to understand them. ‘Why are they quiet?’ ‘How come they don’t want to participate?’”
  - “We all need to be in agreement. Administrators, teachers, everybody, need to project the same thing: ‘Hey, being bilingual is good!’”

## APPENDIX J

1. “More than anything it was about working hard. About working hard. My dad, you know, worked in the fields, then as a mechanic, and he always said, I don’t want you to be like me. I don’t want you to be like me, “No quiero que trabajes como un burro” (I don’t want you working like a donkey).”
2. (2) Illustrative Comments
  - “Uh... my first year, obviously, my first year, coming from Reynosa (Mexico), you know, I didn’t know anything; nothing. And, I spent one year in the ESL, my second year in the U.S., which was my first year in La Joya, I spent three to four weeks perhaps, in an ESL classroom. And then I got moved to a regular classroom. They gave me a test where it was just, read these words. I could read ‘em - I had no clue what I was reading.”
  - “I’m coming here and I understand the grammar rules. I understand, you know, I understand a lot of the concepts. I understand my language. I know how to speak it. I know how to write. So, when it comes to using the English, I know verb tenses. I know adverbs. I know adjectives. I know all of that. So, that helped me, you know, just pick it up.”
3. (2) Illustrative Comments
  - “I mean, earlier, recently, in my first year coming here, it was just work. You know, I was, work, work, and you know, just do my studying, my schooling.”
  - “All throughout school I was very focused on what I had to do. On, you know, what I needed to do. And, it was always my grades and my academics. I loved sports. I played sports throughout. But, academics always took priority. Because of, you know, that was what my dad said. That’s the rule my parents would say; school, school, school.”
4. “Umm... I, I speak a lot of English. I guess it depends, where I’m at. And, my thinking goes along with where I’m at. And, it’s very easy for me to start thinking in Spanish and then finish in English. And, I find myself then, when I was in school, and I’m going to change it a little bit, there was a learning a language and acquiring a language. And, I feel, I honestly feel that I didn’t learn it (English), I acquired it because to me thinking in English is automatic. Just as thinking in Spanish, or, just as mixing English and Spanish when I’m talking. Umm... but if I were to choose one, I’m going to say speak a little bit more Spanish than I do the English. But, my thinking would be a little bit more in English than it is in Spanish.”
5. (4) Illustrative Comments
  - “There was, and I’m not... my first year here...my first year here, there was a lot of fear. I mean, there was just, I couldn’t speak Spanish. We would get swatted. Mr. Ramirez, our principal had his paddle with holes – speak Spanish, we get swatted.”
  - “You know there was always that hope. There’s always that wanting to do more. Wanting to get better. That was the main thing, you know I just, I feel good. I feel

confident right away. I mean, and that was one thing I pride myself on; that I was one year in ESL. Second year, I was already regular, regular classroom.”

- “Because, hopefulness turned into confidence, and then I was, achievement, right? Because of what I was accomplishing. Because of what I was doing.”
- “I didn’t want to get picked on, I didn’t want to be, the “mojado” part. What could I do about it? I didn’t have papers. I mean I was here illegally. So, I mean, what could I do about that? But, I wanted to have a way of defending myself with words. Of, having something to say, ‘Hey, you can call me all you want bro, but I’m the one who’s getting the 90’s and you’re still, you speak English, and you’re getting 70’s.’”

6. (2) Illustrative Comments

- “I could care less what others thought of me. I mean, I really didn’t care. Because, I care more about, ‘Am I doing what I want to do?’ ‘Am I accomplishing my goals?’ ‘Am I, or maybe am I meeting my parents expectations?’ You know, what they want for me. Am I doing that?”
- “If I’m okay with me, I’m my own critic, right? And, I have my expectations. And I don’t except mediocrity from myself.”

7. “Also, for instance, I think students are ‘babied’ too much. There are all sorts of interventions and programs to shelter the students. We lower expectations and try to make things easier for them. Before, we either learned it, or, you got retained and disciplined at home. Nowadays, if the student fails, we have to find out what the teacher is doing wrong; not the student. In my opinion, this approach makes the student less accountable. It places all responsibility on the teacher.”

## APPENDIX K

### 1. (5) Illustrative Comments

- “I was mostly self-directed – always have been. And, I think it was because when I started off, I came from Mexico, I didn’t know any English. When I went to Kindergarten I went through some very harsh experiences. So I learned that, um, I just needed to fend for myself. I did.”
- “In Kindergarten, I remember that the teacher would even, because I didn’t know how to ask to go to the bathroom or anything, she wouldn’t listen. She knew Spanish, but she refused to listen to my requests to go to the bathroom. She just told me I couldn’t. And, so of course, I had an accident.”
- “I needed to sharpen my pencil – I showed her what I needed to do but she wouldn’t listen. She just ignored me. And, we couldn’t get up, but I got up, because she was getting upset. I could tell she was upset with me, cause I wasn’t writing whatever she wanted me to do. I got up – so, what she did, she tied me to a chair. So, that I would learn I could not do that until I would speak English.”
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade – “He did paddle me” (the principal for supposedly speaking Spanish) – “He did.” And then the teacher told me, she took me to her room, she said, ‘You know one day it’s not going to be like this. This is gonna stop one of these days.’ That’s when I learned the word, este, ‘discrimination.’ She told me, she said, and she hugged me, she said, ‘It’s not fair what happened to you’ and she said ‘But, it’s going to change. It’s going to change one of these days.’ And that kept me going.”
- “You see so, education – there was no excuse for us.”

### 2. (2) Illustrative Comments

- “I think in English and I speak English more often than Spanish. When I’m trying to figure things out, I am doing so in English. I express emotion primarily in English, with the exception of a few times when I get really upset. I tend to mix English and Spanish to display my anger or disappointment.”
- “When my children were growing up, I spoke in both languages almost equally because I wanted them to speak two languages. I have always believed it is an asset. As a result, my children are fluent in English and Spanish. This was extremely important to my family.”

### 3. (2) Illustrative Comments

- “Once I saw that I could defend myself in ways where I could, I could easily insult you, without you knowing I was insulting you, I knew I had mastered the English language. And that’s when I said, ‘You know what, this is my ticket. My ticket is to learn it and learn it so well that I could engage in conversation with anyone.’”
- “So, with language, it could be a negative. The lack of knowing, not knowing the English language, was what was holding me down. That was the ball and chain. And,

once I realized that I could get rid of it, and I could, then I felt very empowered. I could say what I wanted to. If I didn't feel comfortable saying it out loud, verbally, *I could write it* (emphasis intended)."

4. (3) Illustrative Comments

- "Once I got past some of that negative stuff, school was beautiful. Because when you're at school, you're a different person. You actually have a different personality. Because once I felt more empowered, [I] felt good because I always felt important and that's what gave me that self-confidence."
- "So at school I felt good. Because, I was looked up to. Nobody said, 'You're a girl, you can't do this' – uh, uh – I could and I did."
- "So at school I was a different person and at home I had to be more submissive. I hated that. Hated that. Hated that part."

5. (2) Illustrative Comments

- "I had teachers, that actually, they saw that there was, maybe this uh, 'una chista' (translated: spark) – that's what I call it when I see it in children. And, I see it. And, I say, 'Man, I'd love to have the opportunity to teach this kid – man he's got that spark! And, nurture that spark – and that's what they (her teachers) did.'"
- "But, these people (her teachers) showed me that, you know what, 'There's these four walls but there's a door too! And, you can go through it anytime.'"

6. "I'm an activist. Been like this since I was 12."

7. (3) Responses

- "The building, the resources, everything we have it's all conducive to learning. I mean you should feel that way. And, it makes it suitable for learning."
- "Because of the way things are, I see kids that, they lack the appreciation of having this type of educational system. They are ignorant of the struggle that we had to go through in order for them to be in this place – with air conditioning – with books – with qualified teachers – with everything that they have. They are ignorant of that fact."
- "And, these kids don't know what it's like to have the 'ganas' (translated: drive) to do it. They have a sense of entitlement."

8. Final Thoughts

- "Students, I think they forgot what dignity is – not for all of them – a majority – they forgot that there's dignity in us. Dignity even in our race – your heritage – everything."
- "It starts really with parents. I can only do so much. And, hopefully, maybe something sticks in there. Something. Something that they'll remember, and say, 'You know what, I can do better. I can do more. I'm worth more.'"
- "The misconception that because you encourage them to speak more English, the

misconception that you are ashamed of the Spanish language.”

- “If you know two languages, you’re worth two people! So, let’s learn two!”

## APPENDIX L

1. “There was no one, uh, uh, pushing me to do better. I think it’s more about maybe babysitting or something like that. I don’t remember someone having an impact on me – for whatever reason – I don’t remember anyone. And the worst part is that even my parents were kind of, uh, ignoring all these problems. They never went to any meetings or things like that. For me it was going to school and coming back. Like there was no, ‘Where’s your report card?’ – ‘We have meetings?’ – ‘We have parent’s night?’ – none of that happened in my life.”
2. “Pos [translated – Well] it was a struggle. But, like I said, not much because everybody was able to communicate with me and I was able to communicate with the other ones. Because, they used the Spanish language. There was no *need* (emphasis intended) for me to learn the other language (English) – even at home.”
3. (4) Illustrative Comments
  - “Every day, I think, I would get up on my own. Ride the bus, uh, it was like, I don’t remember the times, but it was early – maybe 7:30 in the morning.”
  - “What I do remember a lot, now that you ask me about that, is that a lot of the friends from that neighborhood, uh, I mean, most of them, if not a lot of them, I mean I’m talking about a high percentage, did not finish high school. So, even the neighborhood was uh, a group of uh, it was a social area where most of the kids did not really emphasize school.”
  - “I would never do homework. For the most part it was classwork.”
  - “They (my parents) were, I don’t know why, they never mentioned a word like you have to finish school or you have to, they never had an idea that school(s) can be so important. My parents were always focused on other things, maybe.”
4. “With my kids, it’s both – I’d say 70% to 30 – because, I want them to learn Spanish. They don’t know much Spanish so I try to um, to make them learn it. For me, it is important because I want them to be, uh, proud of their, uh, culture - to be proud of, to be able to communicate with their grandparents – and, um, and the area we live, most of the time, I mean a high percentage of people they speak Spanish. So, I don’t want them to be a Hispanic, um, person that doesn’t speak the language.”
5. “I went to school but I didn’t see a purpose to it. Like, I didn’t see why I’d go. I didn’t see a goal – I didn’t have a goal – and I didn’t have an incentive. I didn’t have, like a motive, to keep on going for the most part.”
6. (2) Illustrative Comments
  - “The first day, um, I don’t remember if it was because we were trying to find a place to live, but we went to a relative, some friend’s house, and we ate there. For the first time, it was like something different for me, it was like enchiladas – I like never had enchiladas before. So, just to have that experience it was something different.”



- “Then, once we moved to the uh, house, where we rented, I was there for, like I said, four months, and the ones in front of us, the neighbors, um, they liked to watch a lot or wrestling and things like that – playing sports – and so I got to know them. And, they’re actually the ones who took me to school. Also, since it was like, maybe, the school was about five blocks from our house – So, I used to go with them – I used to ride the car with them every morning – it wasn’t my parents. I never questioned why I would go with them. I never had my mom take me to school. Maybe like, the neighbors saw, maybe the neighbors saw a need for me to go with them. Or, maybe my mom was working – I don’t remember. But I would go with them every morning for four months. So, what they thought about me was that maybe they wanted to help me with a ride. Or, they felt sorry for me that my parents would not take me. But I never thought about it.”

#### 7. (3) Illustrative Comments

- “Well, I think it’s different. They’re different maybe because now we see a need for kids to go to college. Or, at least, high school and we tell them ahead of time.”
- “We tell the kids, we give them advice, as to what classes they should take and things like that. Counselors come to speak to the kids and so I didn’t have that. So, I don’t see anything similar to what I went through when I was in school.”
- “Some of the kids are getting a free pass a lot of the times nowadays, I think. And, um, the language, we still see a lot of kids speaking Spanish most of the times. And, I know that, um, now with the dual-language a lot of the kids speak Spanish and they test in Spanish, so I don’t know why we go back to that? Or, is it because the programs not working, or whatever? But, we see a regress on the kids moving towards learning the language. I think we’re moving back maybe.”

#### 8. Final Thoughts

- “What I’m surprised is that, I came very late (to the United States), I was already 12 years old. And, a lot of these kids that are ELLs – they were born here. So, I don’t see a reason why they would struggle so much. Like, maybe it’s the area or maybe, but someone that would, that would come to school, or, come to school during their early years should not have the problems that these kids are having.

## APPENDIX M

### Teacher Reflection Tool

#### Defining the Identities

Identity	Definition	Example
N – identity	Natural or acquired by birth	Latino by national origin
I – identity	Authorized position, ascribed by the institution, or achieved by the individual	Expectations institutions create that Latinos need to fulfill
D – identity	Individual trait ascribed or achieved by the individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An <i>ascribed Latino</i> refers to an individual who is spoken about or viewed by others as Latino</li><li>• <i>Achieved Latino</i> is the pride an individual has of being Latino</li></ul>
A – identity	Groups of people with shared practices	Latinos who belong to the Latino group or non- Latinos acting or dressing like Latinos

(Andrews, 2013)

#### Self-Reflection Questions

1. How do I think this student *feels* about being in my class?
2. What is this student's language *proficiency*?
3. How does this student socially interact with other *students*?
4. How does this student socially interact with *me*?
5. How can I *adapt* my teaching to best serve this student's needs?